

A Study on Liturgical Inculturation in the Contemporary Church in China Based on Church Teachings and the Spirit of the Liturgy*

禮儀本地化： 從禮儀的訓導原則與其精神 探討當今的中國教會禮儀本地化

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Abstract: ‘Liturgical inculturation’ refers to the concrete realization of the liturgy in the local culture. The prerequisite for inculturation is to understand the nature of the liturgy and to use it as the basis for studying the relationships between the mystery of salvation, the signs and the different cultures. Today, many deviations from liturgical inculturation arise from a lack of understanding of the liturgy: either by seeing all rites as fixed patterns that cannot be changed, or by randomly introducing

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changes without considering the nature of the liturgy, even to the extent of losing the efficacy of the sacraments and hence drifting further away on the path of deviation. In the study below, the nature of the liturgy and its connotative meaning will be used as a starting point in order to specifically examine how the Chinese culture can properly and securely embrace and serve the mystery of salvation. In this way, innovations in the liturgy would be possible while maintaining its spirit.

Keywords: liturgy, signs, inculturation, architecture, Eucharistic Prayer, obedience

[摘要]談到「禮儀本地化」，是指禮儀要具體實現到當地的文化中。本地化的前提是把握禮儀之所是，以其為基礎，研究救恩奧蹟、標記與不同文化之間的關係。當今，很多的禮儀本地化偏差就來自對禮儀的不瞭解：要麼把一切禮節都看成固定模式，不可以有任何的變動；要麼就是大刀破斧地隨意改變而沒有注意禮儀的本質，甚至失去了聖事的事效性，在偏離的路上漸行漸遠。在此，筆者以禮儀之所是，及其內涵意義為出發點，具體探討中國文化如何能夠恰當而穩妥地承載救恩奧蹟，為其服務。如此，把握禮儀的精神，在其中創新。

關鍵詞：禮儀、標記、本地化、建築、感恩經、服從

Introduction

The Chinese word ‘li’ (禮、豊) first appeared in the oracle bone script of the Shang dynasty, and is related to the worship and veneration of gods or the pleading for their protection. In Confucianism, ‘li’ specifies ‘rite’ and ‘order’. The Writings of Master Han Fei, famous writings on Legalism, explain ‘li’ as the principles and guidelines of our everyday behaviour. Generally speaking, Chinese culture and tradition, from the worship of heaven to marriages and funerals, all entail ‘li’. Traditionally, the Chinese called themselves ‘the nation of etiquette’, and in the course of their long history, they have developed specific connotations and rich meanings in their ‘rites’ and ‘rituals’. This has also influenced many other countries, especially the cultures of Southeast Asian countries.

Nestorianism entered China as early as the Tang dynasty, and various elements of the Chinese culture were gradually added to its architecture and painting.¹ However, when Emperor Wuzong later adopted the policy of eliminating Buddhism (AD 840-846), Nestorianism declined as well. During the Yuan dynasty, the Church sent missionaries to China, and one of them, Montecorvino, even translated the New Testament and the Psalms into Mongolian. Unfortunately, missionary activities gradually died down with the collapse of the Yuan dynasty. Later during the Ming

1 Cf. Wushu Lin, *New Reflections on Nestorianism in the Tang Dynasty* (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2003), pp. 3-84.

and the Qing dynasties, a significant number of missionaries again came to China. On 27 June 1615, Pope Paul V approved the use of the Chinese language in the sacred liturgy, marking a very important leap in history. This was supported by the later bull *Romanae Sedis Antistes*, issued by Pope Gregory XV in 1623.² However, it was not able to be widely practised due to the Chinese Rites Controversy. Against such historical background, our Church in China has always fully accepted the ‘Roman rite’ as the norm for her liturgical celebrations, without developing her own cultural specifics in the liturgy. This cultural chasm has often caused the Chinese faithful difficulty in fully participating in liturgical celebrations, as well as a sense of ‘awkwardness’ or ‘weirdness’ when the Gospel is preached and the liturgy introduced to non-believers.

Fortunately, all kinds of theological research have blossomed after the Second Vatican Council, and liturgical inculturation has since been a consistently hot topic even until today. Such research development on liturgical inculturation has been extremely slow or even come to a pause in Europe and the United States due to various historical and cultural reasons. It has, however, accelerated much in Africa, Latin America and Asia, and the author

2 Cf. Thomas Kwok Fai Law and Laura Fung Ling Chak, “The Work of the Translation of Missale Romanum by Lodovico Buglio”, *Shen Xue Lun Ji* 120 (Summer 1999): 255-264; cf. C. Constantino, *Con i Missionari in Cina (1922-1933): Memorie di fatti e di idee*, Vol. II (Roma: Unione Missionaria del Clero, 1946), p. 36.

would be joining this effort here. The following areas would be studied: the basic principles of liturgical inculturation, the fruits of such inculturation efforts in China, the direction and concrete steps that should be taken in the way forward, and the spirit that should be upheld in liturgical inculturation.

1. One Mystery with Diverse Signs

The liturgical movement specifically points out that the liturgy should be explored from the sacramental economy, emphasizing that the mystery of salvation is made present in liturgical celebrations through signs and that in this way the participants encounter the salvation of Christ.³ Such presence, however, does not imply that Christ dies once again in each sacramental celebration. Like all other historical events, His death on the cross occurred in a specific time and cannot be repeated in the once-only historical timeline. What is repeated in each liturgical celebration is the rites. In other words, liturgical celebrations that are repeated in any time and space all make present the unique salvation event – the Paschal Mystery of Christ.

The concept that rites can be repeated is rooted in the Passover Festival ‘commemorated’ by the Israelites. J. L. Gutiérrez Martín points out that ‘rites are related to rules, orders, rhythms, or to be more exact, are consistent with

3 Cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (hereafter referred to as *SC*) 2, 5-7; cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (hereafter referred to as *CCC*) 1066-1068, 1104-1107.

original forms and pre-established typical modes of action.⁴ To put it another way, rites are never the source, but ‘a memory’ or a necessary description of an original event.⁵ The ‘commemoration’ performed by the rites is interwoven with signs and symbols. All liturgical signs exist for the communication of the original salvation event, and we can say that certain specific signs, such as words, materials and postures, used in liturgical celebrations realize our communion with God. Liturgical signs, therefore, are not just neutral labels or conceptual descriptions, but the media of salvation for us.

While being faithful to the apostolic faith, local Churches have developed their own traditions and signs, such as texts and gestures, in the celebration of the same Paschal Mystery. In other words, although the mystery celebrated in the liturgy is one, the forms of its celebration are diverse.⁶ Through the application of specific cultural styles and expressions, various local Churches celebrate the one mystery of salvation in communion with the universal Church.⁷ The unique mystery of salvation and all kinds of lawfully recognized liturgical rites have been well integrated with one another in the communion of faith and life, and

4 J. L. Gutiérrez Martín, *Belleza y misterio. La liturgia, vida de la Iglesia* (Pamplona: Eunsa, 2006), p. 94.

5 Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 101; cf. íd, *L'Eucaristia: rito e mistero*, in *Studi Cattolici* 49, 527, 2005, p. 6.

6 Cf. CCC 1200.

7 Cf. *The Roman Missal*, 2002, 9.

such communion comes from the Gospel of Christ and from truly celebrating His Paschal Mystery. ‘The mystery of Christ is so unfathomably rich that it cannot be exhausted by its expression in any single liturgical tradition. The history of the blossoming and development of these rites witnesses to a remarkable complementarity.’⁸

The liturgical traditions or rites presently in use in the Church are the Latin (including the Roman rite, the Ambrosian rite, etc.) and the Byzantine, Alexandrian or Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, Maronite and Chaldean rites. Holy Mother Church holds all lawfully recognized rites to be of equal right and dignity, and she wishes to preserve them in the future and to foster them in every way.⁹

From the above, we can conclude that liturgical celebrations communicate salvation, and they consist of a series of elements such as words, postures and signs. Although the universal Church celebrates the same mystery of salvation, various rites have developed in the course of history under different cultural contexts. Such relationship between salvation and the various cultural signs forms exactly the starting point and basis for liturgical inculturation. In other words, liturgical inculturation studies how different cultures can become signs of salvation, as salvation should be proclaimed, celebrated and lived out in all cultures. To us, we need to study how Chinese cultural elements can

8 Cf. CCC 1201.

9 Cf. CCC 1203.

appropriately and precisely embrace and serve salvation, so as to enable all Chinese people to receive salvation in a more ‘familiar’ way. Salvation is not administered in a mysterious way – by using the most difficult words; instead it should seek the understanding and active participation of all as we receive the salvation of God. In a nutshell, although the content of the liturgy is mystical, the words used should be clear and easy to understand.¹⁰ Liturgical inculturation works towards enabling certain signs to be clearly visible in the local culture, but it will never change the content that the liturgy embraces – the mystery of salvation.

2. Concrete Work on Chinese Liturgical Inculturation

Liturgical signs can be diverse but not random. When a local Church intends to concretely apply her own cultural elements to the celebration of the mystery of salvation, it should note that ‘the liturgy is made up of unchangeable elements divinely instituted’,¹¹ and of elements subject to change. These latter ought to be changed ‘so as to express more clearly the holy things which they signify. The Christian people, as far as is possible, should be able to understand them with ease and take part in them fully, actively, and as a community.’¹² Based on the principles

10 Cf. J. Aldazábal, “El lenguaje litúrgico. Valoración crítica y perspectivas”, en *Isidorianum* 6 (1997): 421.

11 SC 21.

12 SC 21.

regarding the changeable parts, the author will cite some concrete examples below to illustrate the fruits of the Chinese liturgical inculturation, and the possible steps forward.

2.1 Equivalent Construction

Adaptation, that is, replacing existing elements in the church liturgy with elements of equivalent values and meanings in the local culture, should be used as a starting point for liturgical inculturation.¹³ This is actually a very broad topic, and here the author will use architecture, which is something widely known in general, as an example of illustration. Each architectural style has its own specific historical background and emphasis. The author will study how to apply the Chinese architectural culture with reference to the functions of a church so as to establish our specific architectural style.

A church is a sacred place where the faithful gather and celebrate the liturgy. According to ancient traditions, it is usually tall and prominent, and gathers the faithful for prayer and worship by ringing chimes. It has always had an architectural style resembling a Jewish synagogue or a basilica,¹⁴ and such influence has extended until today. In

13 Cf. Anscar J. Chupungco, *Cultural Adaptation of the Liturgy* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), pp. 81-86.

14 The porticoes in palaces originally refer to those royal porticoes in the Agora of Athens. The ancient Romans later adopted the portico as a covered area to conduct business, resolve conflicts and administer

the course of historical development of the Roman rite, three major and widely known architectural styles have been developed, namely Roman, Gothic and Baroque. The Roman style has the arch as an external feature and places its emphasis on the altar, and the frescoes on the interior of the arch help people lift up their hearts in liturgical celebrations and stimulate their longing to foretaste the mysteries of the kingdom. The Gothic style has the tall and pointed tower as an external feature and places its emphasis on the cross, and its colourful stained glasses can direct the faithful into the mystical depth and help them meditate on the Passion of Christ. The Baroque style places its emphasis on the Eucharistic tabernacle, and its beautiful curvatures and highly skilled carvings help people express their religious sentiments and focus on the mystery of the Eucharist.

The Chinese liturgical inculturation on the architectural aspect can in fact be traced back to times much much earlier than the Second Vatican Council. Churches in the Nestorian period already absorbed elements of the Chinese culture and were built in the pagoda style. In modern times, many churches in China have also been infused with Chinese architectural styles and demonstrate various characteristics

legal matters. After the conversion of Emperor Constantine to Christianity, he built a great number of churches. Some of them were converted from these large rectangular porticoes, while others were constructed in a similar style. The characteristic of this architectural style is its spacious interior, which makes it a perfect gathering place for Christian worship.

of the fusion of Chinese and Western cultures. We can therefore proceed steadily on this path already opened up by our predecessors.

Among the various Chinese architectural styles, pitched roofs in palace architecture give a sacred, grand and solemn feeling, while its curved ‘cornices’ give a gentle and light feeling. This is exactly the requirements of church architecture, that is, at the same time sacred and not heavy.¹⁵ We can thus proceed boldly in the direction of this architectural style and build churches accordingly. A matching baldachin can also be placed over the altar in large churches so as to lessen the showiness of the high and enormous interior and draw the focus to the Eucharist. The ceiling can apply a blue background, symbolizing ‘the worship of heaven’, and frescoes can be painted on it to depict the salvific works of the Trinity. This would convey a clear message that all sacramental celebrations, especially the Eucharist, make present the same salvation. Auspicious clouds in the Chinese style may be added to the background, because ‘cloud’ is a biblical image pointing to the presence of God (cf. Ex 34:5, Lv 16:2; Nb 11:25; Mk 13:26; Rv 14:14-16, etc.).¹⁶ The Eucharistic tabernacle, the altar, the presider’s chair, the ambo, etc. should also be in the same tone as the architectural style.

On the other hand, palace architecture is actually an

15 Cf. Pope Pius XII, *Mediator Dei*, 23.

16 Cf. CCC 697.

art comprising groups of buildings. Transitions from one group to another create impressive spatial orders, producing specific architectural ‘rhythms’ and giving one a new discovery in each of them! Borrowing from this idea, it is possible to construct groups of buildings in a sanctuary or a parish, with the church as the centre. A confession booth of the same style can be constructed and situated in a suitable area outside the church, such as a little lawn or garden near the church entrance. The whole design can refer to the architectural style of the long corridor of the Summer Palace in Beijing, with the confession booth embedded in the long corridor. The original function of such long corridor is for resting and relaxing in the cool of the day, thus a confession booth so located allows the faithful to reconcile with Christ and rest in Him (cf. Mt 11:28-30), as well as expressing reconciliation with God and with our brothers before presenting our offering (going into the church to participate in the celebration, cf. Mt 5:23-25). Accordingly, baptistry, grotto of Our Lady, way of the cross, catechism classrooms, etc. can all be constructed in a similar manner. In this way, the faithful would be able to encounter the Holy Trinity, Mary our Mother, guardian angels and all the saints in the carvings and paintings on the walls and ceilings. Such kind of ‘heavenly palace’ design, which gives an antique, grand and solemn feeling, can become a specific architectural style of our Church in China. Not only would it help to remove the wrong impression that Catholicism is a ‘Western religion’, but also enable us to meet God in a familiar manner.

We Chinese have a contemplative culture, thus it would be possible to get inspirations from both the traditional and the contemporary styles in our development of church architecture. Similarly, it would be possible to develop our own sacred music by applying the special characteristics of Chinese music. Although there are only five notes, namely gōng (宮), shāng (商), jué (角), zhǐ (徵) and yǔ (羽), it generates infinite charm. Examples are *Mo Li Hua* (lit. *Jasmine Flower*), a Jiangsu folk song, which Zhang Yimou used as the theme song of Beijing Olympics and Shanghai Expo; *Kangding Qingge* (lit. *The Kangding Love Song*), a Sichuan folk song, which also has long and lasting charms; *Xiǎo Hé Tǎng Shuǐ* (lit. *Little Running Stream*), a Yunnan folk song, the simple yet colourful melody of which has won the appreciation of many..... Since it is easier to achieve harmony using the pentatonic scale, the ancient Chinese have taken this advantage and have long used the five notes as the basis for song composition. It was later developed into the heptatonic scale..... Lastly, the author proposes that the Church in China should develop iconography specific to the Chinese culture, since holy images are traditionally produced with reference to those of the Renaissance period in Europe, and as a result, the holy images produced all have European faces. We should therefore work towards the development of Chinese artistic styles and image appearances, responding to the invitation of the Church regarding inculturation, and seek “their (fine arts) noble ministry, to the end especially that all things set apart for use in divine worship should

be worthy, becoming, and beautiful, signs and symbols of things supernatural.”¹⁷ To conclude, “(i)t is fitting that liturgical celebration tends to express itself in the culture of the people where the Church finds herself, though without being submissive to it.”¹⁸

2.2 Creative Breakthrough

After briefly discussing adaptation in liturgical inculturation, the author will study in detail the possibility of creativity in liturgical texts. After the Second Vatican Council, our own Spring Festival (Lunar New Year) mass liturgy has already been added to the Chinese version of the Missal. This is something specific in our Missal and a breakthrough in substance. Walking courageously forward along this path, the author will then study the possibility of having our own Eucharistic Prayers.

In the traditional Roman rite, there was only one Eucharistic Prayer, that is, Eucharistic Prayer I in the Roman Missal. After the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI in 1969 approved the addition of three other Eucharistic Prayers, that is, Eucharistic Prayers II, III and IV in the Roman Missal of today. In 1975, the same Pope again approved five other Eucharistic Prayers, including three Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children and two for Masses of Reconciliation. In recent years, some local bishops

17 SC 122.

18 CCC 1207.

also approved certain Eucharistic Prayers fitting the local context. Based on such historical development, drawing up our specific Eucharistic Prayers is certainly possible, and should be the core work of liturgical inculturation .

How to draw up a Eucharistic Prayer (*prex eucharistica*)? We must first understand its structure. Eucharistic Prayer (commonly referred to as ‘*anaphora*’ in Eastern rites, and ‘*eucologia*’ in Western rites) is a form of prayer with very deep biblical roots (cf. 1 Chr 29:10-20; 1 Kgs 8:16-42; Neh 9:6-37, etc.). The biblical passages quoted here are respectively the prayer of David, the prayer of Solomon and the prayer of Ezra. Generally speaking, they all include three aspects: praising the Almighty God and Creator for creating the universe; praising God to commemorate all His works in the history of salvation; praying for the current needs of the people of God. It is praying to ‘God, the Father Almighty’; not only is He the Lord of the universe, but also our ‘Father’. He has come to the help of our ancestors with wondrous signs and mighty power, we therefore pray to this living God for our current needs, and ask Him to come to our help as He has saved our ancestors in the course of history. In the tradition of the Church, a great number of prayers, such as the three Prayers of Consecration in the Sacrament of Holy Orders and the prayer of epiclesis for the blessing of the baptismal water, have applied the above framework. However, it is a pity that many newly-written Collects have gradually lost this structure and depth.

In the Western Church, The Eucharistic Prayer is usually known as The Great Thanksgiving (*Eucologia maior*), which points out that it is even richer and more solemn than the above structural foundation. Its origins are to be found in the Jewish Passover, the rites of which are as follows:¹⁹ starting with a prayer of praise (*qiddus*); blessing of the first cup (O Lord, we praise You, God of hosts, Creator of fruit of the vine.....); drinking of the first cup; washing of the hands (cleaning); eating of bitter herbs; serving of matza and lamb. Through the questions of a child, the elders in the family will explain the history of the Passover and the symbolic meanings of the rites; singing of the first part of praise (*hallēl*);²⁰ blessing of the second cup (O Lord, we praise You, King of the universe, You saved our ancestors from Egypt.....); drinking of the second cup. Again, washing of the hands; blessing of matza; eating of matza and lamb; blessing of the third cup (the Cup of Redemption); drinking of the third cup. Finally, singing of the second part of praise (*hallēl*); closing. There was not a fourth cup in Jesus' times.²¹

The Passover lamb in the Old Testament is in fact a

19 Cf. Rabbi Wayne Dosick, *Living Judaism: The Complete Guide to Jewish Belief, Tradition, and Practice* (Jiangxi: Jiangxi People's Publishing House, 2009), pp. 192-195; cf. Á. García Ibáñez, *L'Eucaristia, dono e mistero* (Roma: Edusc, 2017), pp. 61-62.

20 Ps 113-118 and 136 all start with 'Hallelujah', which means 'Praise God'. Ps 113 and 114 are sung at this moment.

21 Cf. E. Galbiati, *L'Eucaristia nella Bibbia* (Milano: Jaca Book, 1992), p. 107.

biblical type of Jesus in that He redeems humankind by His precious blood. By instituting the Eucharist in a Passover meal (cf. Lk 22:15), He participated in advance in His sacrifice on the cross: this is my body given up for you; this is my blood poured out for you (cf. Lk 22:19; Mt 26:28).²² In the supper, Jesus did not drink one cup only (cf. Lk 22:16-17, 20), and the concrete rites for the institution of the Eucharist refer to the breaking of bread and the Cup of Redemption (cf. Mt 26:26-29; Mk 14:22-25; Lk 22:16-20; 1 Cor 11:24-26). In the rites, He performed seven steps: took the bread, gave thanks, broke it, gave to his disciples, took the cup, gave thanks, gave to his disciples. The liturgical tradition of the Church was based on the Jewish Passover, and condensed these seven points to four basic elements: taking the bread and wine (Offertory), thanksgiving and praise (Eucharistic Prayer), breaking and distributing the bread (Communion Rite).²³

The Eucharistic Prayer is the heart of the above. In the course of history, different Eucharistic Prayers have been drawn up due to different traditions, and they express the richness of the mystery of salvation from different angles.²⁴ Some common elements related to its nature are summarized below:²⁵

22 Cf. SC 47.

23 Cf. *The Roman Missal*, 2002, 72.

24 L. Bouyer, *Eucharistie. Théologie et spiritualité de la peière eucharistique* (Tournai: Desclée, 1966).

25 Cf. *The Roman Missal*, 2002, 79.

- a) The Preface (*praefatio*): The Priest, in the name of the whole of the holy people, gives thanks to God the Father for the whole work of salvation, the summit of which is the Paschal Mystery of Christ. Amendments can be made to this part according to actual needs, and the history of salvation in China should especially be added. Different Prefaces can be drawn up for different feasts to highlight the contribution and influence of persons, such as Matteo Ricci and Xu Guangqi, and certain historical events, to the Chinese faithful.
- b) The Acclamation (*acclamatio*): This is the praise for the salvation of God, the thanksgiving for the reception of salvation (cf. Is 9:2; Ex 15), and should be sung by the whole congregation in a way that expresses the sentiments of their own culture.
- c) The Invocation of the Holy Spirit (*epiclesis*): The Church implores the power of the Holy Spirit that the gifts offered be consecrated, so that they may become the Body and Blood of Christ. This prayer, together with (d) The Institution Narrative and Consecration and (e) The Memorial Prayer, forms the core of the Eucharist, as well as the heart of all liturgical celebrations.²⁶
- d) The Institution Narrative and Consecration (*narratio*

26 Cf. CCC 1106.

institutionis et consecratio): By means of the words and actions of Christ, that sacrifice which He instituted during the Last Supper is effected. This part is taken from the words of Jesus in the Bible, and has been handed on to us by the authority of the Church, hence it should not be amended.

- e) The Memorial Prayer (*anamnesis*): The Church fulfils the command that she received from Christ the Lord through the Apostles. When we celebrate the memorial of this holy salvific act, God remembers His mercy and comes to save us, fulfilling His promise to us.
- f) The Oblation (*oblatio*): The community of the faithful, in the Holy Spirit, offers this unblemished sacrifice, together with their very selves and the whole universe, to God the Father.
- g) The Intercessions (*intercessiones*): The whole mystical body of Christ prays to the living Father for her current needs. This part can incorporate the current needs of the universal Church and the local Church, as well as the characteristics of prayer of our own culture, in order to draw up prayers fitting the actual context. For example, praying for world peace, because the unending research on biochemical weapons can probably lead to the annihilation of the human race; praying for a right conscience, so that ethical minds can be formed, detesting those societal

phenomena that are against conscience, such as ‘fraudulent claims for compensation’ and ‘adulterated food products’..... In this way, each one of us Christians would be able to establish relationship with God and bear witness to His salvation concretely in our daily lives.

- h) The Concluding Doxology (*doxologia finalis*): To respond to the blessing of the Father, through Christ and in the Holy Spirit, by praise, thanksgiving and surrender.

Besides having the Eucharistic Prayer as the core, the Liturgy of the Eucharist also consists of the Offertory and the Communion Rite. The prayers of the Offertory were drawn up after the Second Vatican Council, and were based on the praise of the Israelites for the creation of God, thus emphasizing the worship of the whole creation towards the Father in Christ.²⁷ Both the Offertory and the Eucharistic Prayer are prayers directed to the Father. The prayers of the Communion Rite, however, are directed to Christ, and this part is also commonly known as the breaking of bread. Through the breaking of bread, we receive Jesus Christ into our hearts, let Him nourish us and become the source of our lives.

27 Cf. A. Bugnini, *La reforma de la liturgia* (1948-1975) (Madrid: BAC, 1999), pp. 324-331; cf. L. Bouyer, *Il Consolatore* (Alba: Paoline, 1983), p. 416.

Up to this point, we have studied the structure of the Liturgy of the Eucharist, especially the historical background, structure and meaning of the Eucharistic Prayer, and the parts in it that would be suitable for inculturation. It is hoped that this would act as a stimulation for efforts of drawing up Eucharistic Prayers fitting the local context. Similarly, we can also extend such work to each of the sacraments and sacramentals.

3. ‘Obedience’ required in Liturgical Inculturation

Liturgical inculturation is a hot topic in the Church, and is being actively promoted in different regions. In the course of practice, ‘(l)iturgical diversity can be a source of enrichment, but it can also provoke tensions, mutual misunderstandings, and even schisms.’²⁸ Here, the Church reminds us that ‘(liturgical) diversity must not damage unity. It must express only fidelity to the common faith, to the sacramental signs that the Church has received from Christ, and to hierarchical communion.’²⁹

Joseph Ratzinger has pointed out the disorderedness created by the liturgical reforms after the Second Vatican Council - ‘to many people, the liturgical celebration of the Eucharist has already become a playground for demonstrating individual creativity. They create whatever they want,

28 CCC 1206.

29 CCC 1206.

leaving only the format of the consecration intact.’³⁰ Based on biblical revelation, he conducted an in-depth reflection and arrived at this: the basic format of Christian liturgy is determined by biblical faith. God first revealed Himself, and revealed the liturgical requirements Himself: to go into the wilderness to worship Him according to His will (cf. Ex 7:16). This is a special feature in the worship of a revealed religion, otherwise, it would be like the worship of unknown gods of non-revealed religions.³¹ In the New Testament, Jesus Christ asked his disciples to prepare a large, furnished upper room (cf. Lk 22:12). At His Last Supper, He even commanded, ‘(D)o this in remembrance of me’ (1 Cor 11:24). From these we can conclude, true liturgy should be based on the revelation of God Himself and how we should worship Him. In other words, the worshipping rites are not created but are received, and demonstrate our obedience to God. This is the basic stance that we should maintain in liturgical inculturation. Any creativity in the process of inculturation should be obedient to the requirements of the liturgy itself, and its concrete practice should be obedient to the authority of the Church.³²

J. L. Gutiérrez Martín explains that the sacred celebrations of the Church cannot be solely reduced to

30 J. Ratzinger, *Natura e compito della liturgia* (Milano: Jaca Book, 1993), p. 98.

31 Cf. id., *El espíritu de la liturgia. Una introducción* (Madrid: Cristiandad, 2001), p. 42.

32 Cf. *The Roman Missal*, 2002, 1.

cultural elements, because the event that happened transcends the limited possibilities of any cultural context. This event is exactly the indescribable existence of the mystery of salvation,³³ which is a mystery preceding any culture. We can therefore say that the actual challenge of liturgical inculturation is: how to express the mystery of salvation in the ways chosen by God Himself, and at the same time make it easily comprehensible to the people of today.

Because of the above, if we were to do well the work of liturgical inculturation, we would need to return to biblical revelation itself : the mystery of salvation and its methods of communication. ‘For it is from it (sacred scripture) that lessons are read and explained in the homily, and psalms are sung. It is from the scriptures that the prayers, collects, and hymns draw their inspiration and their force, and that actions and signs derive their meaning. Hence in order to achieve the restoration, progress, and adaptation of the sacred liturgy it is essential to promote that warm and lively appreciation of sacred scripture.’³⁴ Inculturation should never be used as an excuse to manipulate any liturgical celebration, and ‘no sacramental rite may be modified or manipulated at the will of the minister or the community. Even the supreme authority in the Church may not change the liturgy arbitrarily, but only in the obedience of faith and with religious respect

33 Cf. Martín, *Belleza y misterio. La liturgia, vida de la Iglesia*, pp. 98-103.

34 SC 24.

for the mystery of the liturgy.³⁵

Conclusion

Liturgical inculturation is not the goal in itself, instead it is to better communicate the mystery of salvation. Liturgical celebrations are never to be modified at our own will, instead the nature of the liturgy and the methods of receiving redemption in a familiar way are to be explored. Hence, the liturgy is never anyone's private property, and no one may amend or replace anything in it at his/her own will,³⁶ or try to make up so-called creative elements just because of the fact that there is not any Catholic rite specific to the Chinese culture.

The true meaning of liturgical inculturation should be based on biblical revelation. The liturgy is a difficult subject regarding salvation, and one should study the liturgy and the meanings of the concrete rites in an in-depth manner. Only when we fully understand the nature of the liturgy would we be able to produce ripened fruits of inculturation, that is, the diverse liturgical traditions or rites all being able to communicate the same mystery of salvation and manifest the catholicity of the Church.³⁷

Liturgical inculturation is a long and important journey

35 CCC 1125.

36 Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 52.

37 Cf. CCC 1208.

for the Church in China, and accumulation and reflection of experience in the local Churches over a prolonged period are necessary to achieve this historical mission. In the meantime, as the work of liturgical inculturation would require the help of professionals in various areas, such as liturgical scholars, biblical scholars, historians, cultural studies scholars, architects and artists, the Church needs to train up more talents so that the work can be proceeded in a speedy and stable manner.